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# THE FOURTH ACT

A Play in One Scene  
FOR THREE PEOPLE  
BY  
BASIL MACDONALD HASTINGS



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by

STEPHEN LEACOCK

and

BASIL MACDONALD HASTINGS

---

Originally produced at the COLISEUM, London, on  
November 29, 1915, with the following cast :—

JACK ANNERLY	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Charles Hawtrey</i>
GEORGE GNOOF	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Miles Malleson</i>
BLIGHT	.	.	.	<i>Mr. E. W. Tarver</i>
DORA DNIEPER	.	.	.	<i>Miss Mona Harrison</i>

SCENE - *A sitting-room*

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A PLAY IN ONE SCENE

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NOV 29 1916

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## CHARACTERS

SIR PHILIP À COURCY.

MR. ROBERT VALPAS—*His Secretary.*

MISS DAPHNE ALLOA.

First performed at the London Coliseum July 17, 1916  
with the following cast:—

MISS DAPHNE ALLOA	. . .	<i>Miss Lillah McCarthy.</i>
SIR PHILIP À COURCY	. . .	<i>Mr. Ben Webster.</i>
MR. ROBERT VALPAS .	. . .	<i>Mr. Allan Wade.</i>

The play produced by MR. CHARLES HAWTREY.

## THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE.—*Sir Philip's Study in Carlton House Terrace.*

*The room is handsomely furnished and carpeted. In the R. wall, slightly up stage, is a large window. The door is in the back wall, slightly to L. The whole of the L. wall and R. half of the back wall and the lower part of the R. wall are covered by books. Down R. is a small set of steps such as is used for getting books from high shelves. In the centre is a large writing-desk with revolving chair. There is another chair to L. of desk. Below the desk is a comfortable couch. Close to the L. end of couch is a small smoker's table. It is a bright summer morning and the sun streams in through window R.*

*When the curtain rises SIR PHILIP À COURCY is discovered looking out of the open window R. He is a good-looking, clean-shaven young man of about thirty-two.*

SIR PHILIP (*shouting through window*). Keep your bat straight and keep your right foot still, Alan. That's it. Plant it there and make a resolution not to move it. . . . Keep your bat straight. . . .

(*There are boyish cries from outside: "Bravo! Middle Stump. Hooray!"*)

(Enter MR. ROBERT VALPAS, SIR PHILIP'S *Secretary*.  
*He is a gentleman of about the same age as SIR PHILIP.*)

ROBERT (*familiarly*). I say, Philip, there's a girl here, and I can't get rid of her.

PHILIP. Oh confound it! Just when I'm busy . . . coaching the boys in cricket.

ROBERT. What shall I say?

PHILIP (*coming from window*). That means you want me to see her, eh; Robert?

ROBERT. I should if I were you. She's got the smartest hat on I ever saw.

PHILIP (*sternly*). Private secretaries should have eyes for the head and not the hat. What does she want?

ROBERT. Won't say! Won't go. Dared me to carry her out. I'd like to.

PHILIP (*frowning*). Robert, you're a perfect idiot with women.

ROBERT. Well, I like that . . . no more than you are with cricket.

PHILIP. Get rid of her. (*He returns to the window.*)

(ROBERT shrugs his shoulders and goes out.)

(PHILIP now shouts further advice to the boys outside.)

(MR. ROBERT VALPAS returns.)

ROBERT. Shall I send for the police?

PHILIP. Oh, confound it. Robert, you're worse than useless. Is she a lady?

ROBERT. Certainly, I should say.

PHILIP. Then she'll go if I tell her to. Show her in.

(Exit ROBERT, smiling.)

PHILIP (*talking through window*). Pitch 'em a bit shorter, Phil. It's better to be a trifle short than too well up. Here! Put a shilling down and try to hit it. (*He throws a shilling out of the window.*)

Now, don't fight for it. Split it afterwards. Put that off stump straight, Alan.

(During this ROBERT shows in MISS DAPHNE ALLOA.

DAPHNE is a pretty woman of about thirty. Her clothes are tailor-made and practical, but still very smart. A rakish little fur hat gives a touch of individuality to her appearance. ROBERT carries her attaché case.)

DAPHNE. Good morning ! . . . (To ROBERT) Put my luggage down.

(ROBERT puts the case on the desk and gazes admiringly into DAPHNE'S eyes.)

PHILIP (turning). Mr. Valpas !

(Exit ROBERT.)

DAPHNE. Don't scold him. He's been such good company.

PHILIP. Oh, has he ? Will you be good enough to say what you want. I don't—I can't see people without appointments. Every moment of my time is occupied with——

(Boys' voices—"Aren't you coming to play, Daddy ?")

(DAPHNE peeps round his shoulder at the open window.)

Ahem ! Take a chair.

(DAPHNE sits in chair L. of desk.)

DAPHNE. Do you mind if I make a note ?

PHILIP. N—o, but I shall be glad if——

DAPHNE. Have you a pencil ?

PHILIP. Certainly. There it is. (He gives her one.)

DAPHNE. This chair is uncomfortable. May I sit down there on the couch—just by that dear little table? (*She sits on sofa.*)

PHILIP. If you like.

(DAPHNE moves to L. end of couch. She produces notebook from attaché case and places it on the little smoker's table. Then she makes a note.)

Certainly! Make yourself at home.

(PHILIP bending over attaché case and noting its contents). I knew it! I knew it! You're an actress. That case contains the type-script of a play. I know 'em a mile off. You're an actress, aren't you?

DAPHNE. Indeed no. I'm an author.

PHILIP (*despairingly*). An author! Worse and worse.

DAPHNE. Yes, Sir Philip à Courcy. An author! Now you know why I am here.

PHILIP (*gloomily*). I can guess.

DAPHNE. For many months I have been working at a play. I want you to produce it.

PHILIP (*groaning*). Oh Lord! Oh Lord! (*Turns up L.C.*)

DAPHNE. But you produce so many. Everybody knows you are behind the Archbishop's Theatre and they say you have a share——

PHILIP. Please! Please! Please! . . . In the first place what is your name?

DAPHNE. Daphne Alloa.

PHILIP. Daphne Alloa! (L.C.) You've never written anything before in your life, have you?

(DAPHNE shakes her head.)

Of course not. Suddenly you read a fatuous paragraph in a paper that a play might be worth £100,000!

DAPHNE. So I did.

PHILIP. Of course you did. You immediately get an idea. You tell a friend about it, a literary friend, perhaps.

DAPHNE. She is. She has had a poem accepted by royalty.

PHILIP. I knew it. This friend encourages you, heaven forgive her. You write your play and it's generally a farrago of nonsense composed of what you remember of "Charley's Aunt," "The Sign of the Cross," "The Belle of New York," and the Drury Lane Pantomime. You hawk it round the managers——

DAPHNE. I didn't hawk. I couldn't hawk.

PHILIP. Well, you offer it anyway. No one will produce it. So you sob your heart out and try and get a job as a dramatic critic—to get your own back.

DAPHNE (*meekly*). And are all beginners the same.

PHILIP. Well, you're something of an exception. You're the first author that ever got into this room without an introduction. . . . Now, Miss Alloa, I can't produce your play. I can't. I won't. I can't. I w——Oh! if only you knew how I'm pestered. (*Down L.*)

DAPHNE. But don't you like it? You're a multi-millionaire, passionately devoted to the arts.

PHILIP. Passionately devoted to fiddlesticks. I detest the theatre and all its works.

DAPHNE. You detest the theatre! Then how on earth does it happen——

PHILIP. I support the theatre because I can't help myself. It's a family curse.

DAPHNE. A family curse!

PHILIP. Yes. The first folio of Shakespeare was dedicated to one of my ancestors. (*PHILIP L.C. by small table.*) Ever since then the family has been quite mad about the drama. I inherited millions certainly, but a big share of it is tantamount to a trust fund which must be used for theatrical enterprises. Every decade, for instance, I'm practically

committed to presenting Shakespeare in a new way. I'm an impresario against my will, I tell you.

DAPHNE. It must be very hard, certainly, to have to spend so much money on what you don't like.

PHILIP. Now if it were the music-hall profession, I'd enjoy it. I adore a good music-hall show, don't you? No humbugging art about it. It's real, it's actual, it's satisfying.

DAPHNE. Lockhart's Elephants and Karno's Mumming Birds, and all that.

PHILIP. Precisely. Not forgetting "Boiled Beef and Carrots."

DAPHNE. But surely there are some plays that are real and actual and satisfying. I'm sure mine is.

PHILIP. Dear me, yes. I was forgetting about your play. What's it about?

DAPHNE. Myself.

PHILIP. Oh—h! That's—that's—well, that's different.

DAPHNE. Every one can write one play or one book.

PHILIP. Oh, I've heard that so often.

DAPHNE. It's truer than you think. Well, my play is in four acts. (*She takes out script.*)

PHILIP. But there are only three there.

DAPHNE. Exactly. The fourth remains to be written.

PHILIP. Indeed.

DAPHNE. I'm going to write it here.

PHILIP. My dear lady, I really must ask you——

DAPHNE. First, with your permission, I want to make a sketch map of the room, what is called a scene plot, I believe.

PHILIP. But I tell you that my time—— (*Boyish voices are heard calling from off R., "Dad! Dad!"*)

PHILIP (*going to window*). I'll come out in a few minutes.

(*He closes window.*)

DAPHNE (*going to window and looking out*). Are those your boys?

PHILIP. Yes.

DAPHNE. You're a widower, aren't you?

PHILIP. Yes.

DAPHNE. Curious. You're a widower with two boys and I'm a widow with two girls. Look! (*She produces a locket.*) There are my two girls.

PHILIP (*diffidently*). Very charming.

DAPHNE. Their names are Daphne and Ursula. The one on the right is Ursula.

PHILIP. Quite so.

DAPHNE. And the one on the left is Daphne.

PHILIP. Quite so.

DAPHNE. But we must get on with our work, mustn't we?

PHILIP. *Our work!*

DAPHNE. Oh yes. I know you'll help. Let me see. Window up R. (*she makes notes*), door in back hall, slightly L. Large writing-desk C. with revolving chair. Below desk a comfortable couch. Room for—sit beside me, will you? Just room for two.

(*She rises and he after her.*)

Smoker's table to L. of sofa. (*She returns to steps and sits on them.*) It is a bright summer morning. When the curtain rises Sir Philip à Courcy is discovered. He is a good-looking——

PHILIP. Thank you!

DAPHNE. Clean-shaven——

(*PHILIP feels his chin.*)

—bright-eyed young man of thirty—er—thirty-three.

PHILIP. Thirty-two.

DAPHNE. Thank you, thirty-two. Just a little opening talk with the secretary and then I come on. Where were you standing?

PHILIP. Oh, bother it. Does that matter?

DAPHNE. A little. Stand at your desk, will you?

*(She guides him to a position above the writing-table.)*

Then I come on impetuously. Like this. Suddenly I stop, and I'm frozen to the spot.

PHILIP. What! On a morning like this? Besides, you weren't.

DAPHNE. No. But I ought to be. It's the way things happen in plays. I should be frozen to the spot—and then I should melt into your arms.

PHILIP. Madam!

DAPHNE. Yes. But then I ought to have known you before. Watch how I would do it. I would come in—so. I would freeze to the spot—so. And then I would exclaim with a genuine air of astonishment—"So it is you!"

PHILIP. Of course it's me—I mean I.

DAPHNE. Ah, but you ought to be something out of my past. You should be the man who robbed me of my fortune or something like that. You should have promised to marry me and deserted me for an heiress. I suppose you never did jilt me, did you?

PHILIP. Certainly not.

*(DAPHNE makes a note.)*

DAPHNE. No. I'm afraid I've never seen you before in my life.

PHILIP. You have not.

*(DAPHNE makes a note.)*

And I'm busy.

DAPHNE *(wistfully)*. Ah, don't say that again. I'm not really joking—or rather I'm joking to make the interview pleasant for you. If I were tragic you wouldn't like me. And yet it is true that I and my

little girls are very nearly at the end of our bread money. . . . Ah, don't curl your nice mouth. I like you severe—better than sympathetic. And you know you agreed to help me with the play.

PHILIP. If you are telling me the truth—about your financial position—don't bother any more about the play. Let me give you an introduction to——

DAPHNE (*still taking notes*). You ought to move about more. On the stage the characters have to keep making crosses. They don't sit still all through an interview. Do you mind walking away somewhere and coming back.

PHILIP (*stamping petulantly up the window*). This is really very ridiculous.

DAPHNE. Thank you so much. "Petulantly stamping up R." (*She makes a note.*)

PHILIP. What are you writing down there?

DAPHNE. Everything you say or do.

PHILIP. Are you a newspaper woman—or a private detective—or a——

DAPHNE (*busily writing*). Splendid! Splendid! That was almost dramatic.

PHILIP. Why are you writing this down?

DAPHNE. Because this is the fourth act. Everything we say makes up the dialogue.

PHILIP. Miss Alloa, I ask you again to go.

(*He picks up her hat and hurts finger on pin*) "Damn!"

DAPHNE. Quite right. You must, you must ask me again and again, or the fourth act won't be long enough. Ah, don't get really angry. Don't you see that like the nice, kind man you are, you are giving me everything I want.

PHILIP. Thank goodness for that.

DAPHNE. My play is about a girl who wrote a play—about me. The first three acts tell the story of how I came to write that play and what happened when I took it to the managers. Every word of it is true.

PHILIP. Then what's the trouble?

DAPHNE. Because the managers won't produce it. How can they—without a happy ending.

PHILIP. Can't you make a happy ending?

DAPHNE. No. But *you* can.

PHILIP. I see. If I say that I will finance the play, you'll write that down and bring down the curtain on it.

DAPHNE. How quick you are!

PHILIP. And the corollary is that I throw away some thousands of pounds.

DAPHNE. And the cor-r- (*writing*). Please spell corollary.

PHILIP (*forgetting himself*). C-o-r—— Oh, hang it, spell it yourself.

DAPHNE. That's right. Be brusque and rough. Bully me. And then melt. Come up to me and smack the open palm of your left hand with your clenched right and say——

*(There is a crash from off R.)*

Whatever was that?

PHILIP. One of my boys fallen into a cucumber-frame . . . (*He goes up R.*)

*(He goes to window and DAPHNE, after putting down her notebook on top of steps, follows him.)*

DAPHNE (*looking out at the boys*). Aren't—they—just—lovely?

PHILIP (*pleased*). Like their father, don't you think!

DAPHNE. How old are they?

PHILIP. Well, Philip's eight, yes, eight and two months. Alan's a few days short of seven.

DAPHNE. Eight and seven! Why, I should have said at least twelve and ten.

PHILIP (*pleased*). Would you?

DAPHNE. Rath-er! How lucky you are to have boys. My little girls are dears—but it's not quite the same thing, is it?

PHILIP. Well, there's a difference.

DAPHNE (*softly*). When—when did their mother die, Sir Philip?

PHILIP. When Alan was born.

DAPHNE. Ah . . . (*she stands watching at the window*).

(*PHILIP comes down to desk.*)

Stand back to them dear. (*She pulls open window.*) You'll get hit on the knuckles every time if you play forward to that sort of ball. Stand back and lift your bat high. Ah! That's better.

Boys. Right O! Ha! ha!

(*There is a burst of boyish laughter. PHILIP gazes at her in amazement.*)

PHILIP. What you do know about cricket?

DAPHNE. As much as most men. (*She shuts window.*) I'd love to go down and play with them. May I?

PHILIP. You want to go down there! But what about the fourth act?

DAPHNE. Yes, but I was beginning to despair of your helping me.

PHILIP. Look here, I'll—I'll do what I can.

DAPHNE (*genuinely surprised and grateful*). You—will! How splendid of you.

PHILIP. Not at all. You're as irresistible as my secretary said you were. He's a bit of an ass, but he was right this time. Sit down.

DAPHNE. Shall I? Where?

PHILIP. Here: on this sofa (*she sits and he sits beside her*), where there is just room for two. Tell me about the play. Is there any love interest in it?

DAPHNE. Ye-es. But not for the principal character.

PHILIP. And the principal character is you?

DAPHNE. M'm.

PHILIP. Designing widow, aren't you?

DAPHNE. Well, yes. But in the nicest possible sense.

PHILIP. Oh yes, of course. Do you think that the play has a dog's chance without some love interest for the heroine?

DAPHNE. It would be better, I admit. But you see every line of the play is true. And I can't invent a lover for myself.

PHILIP. Supposing I were to invent one for you. . . . Yes, I admit I'm getting interested. You seem a clinking good sort. Can you bowl?

DAPHNE. Yes. Quite a decent leg break.

PHILIP (*almost fervently*). A decent leg break? Yes, I'm sure of it. Well, it would be quite easy to make love to you for the purposes of your play.

DAPHNE. I'd hate you to put yourself out.

PHILIP. Not at all. I'm really disengaged till twelve. You'll want the notebook.

DAPHNE. Yes. (*She rises.*) But still—if you don't feel like it—it won't be much use to me.

PHILIP. I can be desperately in earnest for the time being. You aren't the only pretty widow in the world.

DAPHNE (*picking notebook from desk*). No. I dare say you're in practice. Begin.

PHILIP. Sit here. (*He indicates couch.*)

DAPHNE (*meekly*). I will.

PHILIP (*rising and clearing his throat*). Now we'll begin. Do you—do you—— Don't look at me!

DAPHNE. No?

PHILIP. You should realize what is coming and look away. Make patterns on the carpet with your toe.

DAPHNE (*slightly raising her skirt and scraping the floor with the tip of a pretty shoe*). Like that?

PHILIP. Yes. (*He comes closer.*) Just like that. You're writing something on the carpet. What is it?

DAPHNE. "Yours truly, Daphne Alloa."

PHILIP. You're the most adorable woman I've seen in my life.

DAPHNE (*writing in her book*). "You're the most adorable woman I've seen in my life." Do you really think so, Philip?

PHILIP. Yes, dear.

DAPHNE (*making note*). "Yes, dear."

PHILIP. That's good . . . "dear!" don't you think? I feel so at home with your eyes. Some widows' eyes make you feel as if you're out for the night.

(*Both repeat the last sentence.*)

DAPHNE (*writing*). It's a risky line. Do you think I ought to put it in?

PHILIP. Oh yes. The censor 'll cut it out. And then you wear your clothes so cosily. You make a sort of chrysalis of them.

DAPHNE (*making a note*). You dear! No necessity to write your dialogue. I shall remember every word of it.

PHILIP. You're so cousinly and all that.

DAPHNE. Whatever "that" may be. (*Making a note.*)

PHILIP. You're the sort of girl who comes on Sunday afternoon and stays for ever.

DAPHNE. M'm. A sort of spare-room girl!

PHILIP. A sort of mistletoe girl, a sort of taxi-cab girl, a sort of sit-out-the-next-foxtrot girl.

DAPHNE. Next-foxtrot girl! Philip, you've got me set. Now you ought to propose.

PHILIP. Already!

DAPHNE. Unless you think it would come as a shock to me.

PHILIP. Very well.

DAPHNE. One minute.

PHILIP. What is it?

DAPHNE. I must turn away and make patterns with my toe. *(She lifts her skirt and writes on the carpet again.)*

PHILIP. What do you write this time?

DAPHNE. "Yours truly, Daphne à Courcy."

PHILIP. . . . Miss Alloa—Daphne—

*(DAPHNE writes.)*

I'm sick of not being engaged, aren't you?

DAPHNE. Oh dear, this is realism!

PHILIP. What would you have me say?

DAPHNE. Well, I thought you'd begin like this. Intoxicated by your maddening beauty and thrilled by the evidences of your sublime intellect—

PHILIP. I hate intellect.

DAPHNE. "—I offer you my heart, my name and my fortune. As for your play, I will arrange for its sumultaneous production in five capitals, and—and will you stop to lunch?"

PHILIP. That's your idea of a happy ending!

DAPHNE. Yes. And, after all, I'm the author.

PHILIP. Well, put it that way if you like. What is your answer?

DAPHNE. My answer is yes. Now you kiss me.

*(He hesitates a little.)*

DAPHNE. Only a stage kiss.

PHILIP. What sort's that?

DAPHNE. You all but do it, but you don't.

*(PHILIP puts knee on sofa and leans over her.)*

PHILIP. How's this? *(He bends over her and kisses her.)*

DAPHNE. Thank you. *(She writes)* "He kisses

her." And, now again. (*He kisses her.*) Thank you. (*She writes.*) "He kisses her again."

DAPHNE. It doesn't seem right somehow.

PHILIP. Doesn't it. Seemed all right to me.

DAPHNE. No. Stage directions always say, "He snatches her to him." Can you snatch?

PHILIP. No, but I can try.

DAPHNE. Well, I'll show you how it's done and then you can snatch me.

(*She throws her arms around him and kisses him.*)

Like that.

PHILIP. I don't think much of that—you bumped my nose. I can snatch better than that. How's this? . . .

(*He makes a grab at her and presses her to him.*)

DAPHNE. You are very quick to learn!

PHILIP. Oh. It's just a knack, just a knack (*airily*).

DAPHNE. I hope that's all it is.

PHILIP (*swinging himself about*). I like this act.

DAPHNE. I knew you would.

PHILIP. Let's go on with it.

DAPHNE. But a kiss is an ending.

PHILIP. Nonsense. It's a beginning.

DAPHNE. I think you might say something more.

PHILIP. I'll whisper it. (*He whispers in her ear.*)

DAPHNE (*laughing*). I must write that down.

PHILIP. Wha-a-t?

DAPHNE. It can come after the curtain's fallen if you like.

PHILIP. But when the curtain falls that is the end of the play.

DAPHNE. Yes—indeed. And, now that the act is finished (*she draws a line in her notebook*), we must not pretend any more.

PHILIP. Oh, Lord, yes. I was pretending, wasn't

I? Well, I'm quite willing to be serious after the curtain has fallen.

DAPHNE. To be serious.

PHILIP. I mean—to be sincere.

*(He places his hand on DAPHNE'S.)*

DAPHNE. Philip! *(She catches her breath as his meaning dawns upon her.)* Let's pretend the curtain's down now.

PHILIP. Better than that. We'll have it down.

*(He comes to prompt corner.)*

Do you mind letting down the curtain, please?

VOICE FROM PROMPT CORNER. Certainly, sir.

*(PHILIP takes DAPHNE'S left hand in his right and they wait while the curtain falls. When the curtain rises they are seen in close embrace. When they realize the curtain is up they break the embrace and pretend to be concerned with other things.)*







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